

# **2019 ANNUAL REPORT**

## **RIGHTS OF WAY COMMITTEE**

In 2019 the Rights of Way Committee (RoW) marked its 30<sup>th</sup> year as a permanent town committee, and its purpose is as important today as it was at the start: “to identify, mark and maintain access to public property and public rights of way over private property” so that the public can enjoy Rockport’s special open spaces in the woods and along the shore.

In our 2018 report we provided a detailed summary of our ongoing activities in support of our purpose, as well as a few new projects. This year we will focus on many new initiatives that kept our committee very busy throughout the year (having only eight of the designated nine members).

### **OPERATIONS**

#### **Archiving of RoW Records on Town Google Drive**

In its 30 years of existence, RoW amassed two cabinets full of paper records, plus volumes of electronic records. It was a wealth of information, but not easily accessed. In 2019, RoW completed a major project to reorganize all of the Committee’s electronic files into a logical file structure and move them to the Town’s Google Drive, where they are more secure and more accessible to committee members and town officials. We also created a digital inventory of the paper files.

#### **“Blue Book” Guide Now Available Online**

RoW’s *Rockport Guide to Public Paths & Town Landings* a.k.a. the “Blue Book” was produced in 1995 and is now out of print. Since it is still in high demand, the Committee made a PDF version available on the RoW website, as an interim measure until such time as we can update and reprint it.

#### **New Protocol for Found Fishing Gear**

During the Earth Day 2018 cleanup we encountered piles of fishing gear washed ashore and were uncertain what to do. After discussion with the Harbormasters, fishermen, and DPW, we drafted a protocol to follow for notification of owners or proper disposal. The protocol was finalized in 2019 and shared with the Conservation Commission and other groups involved in work along the shore.

#### **New Graffiti Removal Protocol**

Rockport has long had zero tolerance for graffiti in publicly visible spaces, whether public or private, and has a task force in place to handle removal, with support from RoW. In 2019 the policies and procedures of the task force were put into writing as a “Graffiti Removal Protocol” so that it can be widely shared and used as a reference by anyone who sees defacing graffiti anywhere in town. The protocol is posted on the RoW website.

#### **New Policy on Trail Clearing and Equipment Use**

RoW is involved in extensive trail clearing and has a collection of hand and power tools for this purpose. To provide guidance to members and work-day volunteers, RoW developed a written policy for where and how trail clearing can be done, and procedures for use of RoW tools. The policy is posted on the RoW website.

#### **Research on History and Status of Rights of Way**

Research into the origins and current status of public rights of way over both public and private property is an ongoing activity, as new questions and challenges to public rights of access arise on a regular basis. In 2019 we researched paths that provide access to the Atlantic Path, footpaths off Hillside Street, Flat Point, the Saratoga Footbridge, Long Beach, and more, all in an effort to ensure preservation of public access to the woods and the shore.

## **MAJOR PROJECT**

### **Atlantic Path / Sea Rocks project**

In 2017 RoW received a \$50,000 Community Preservation grant to establish a well-marked footpath across the town-owned Sea Rocks at Hoop Pole Cove that would make it easier for people to traverse the area, and thus restore an important link in the historic Atlantic Path from Pigeon Cove Harbor to Halibut Point State Park. After considerable investigation and consultation with the Conservation Commission, RoW determined that the project was more challenging than anticipated. As an alternative we reached out to the neighboring property owners, and are now engaged in promising discussions regarding a possible alternative route across their property. The Committee hopes to reach agreement on a new path and implement it in 2020.

## **CLEARING OF PATHS AND TRAILS**

### **Earth Day Clean Up at Delamater**

We participated in Earth Day by clearing trails at Delamater Preserve with the help of more than a dozen volunteers. We also showed a video and manned an informational table at the Community House as part of the educational aspect of the Earth Day celebration.

### **Andrews Woods Cleanup**

In November RoW partnered with the Friends of Andrews Woods to organize a half-day cleanup of all the trails through Andrews Woods. More than 40 people from the neighborhood plus students from the high school's Green Team joined us. Together the group made quick work of the project, and left the trails in great shape for winter walking.

### **Clearing of Atlantic Path and Other Areas**

In addition to the special projects above, the Committee had a hand in clearing other trails, including the Kieran Preserve, the Headlands, Steep Bank Landing, the Waring Field barway, trails in the South Woods, and more. We are developing a schedule to keep up with needed clearing on a regular basis in the future. We also arranged for periodic professional trimming of the Atlantic Path throughout the summer from Cathedral Ave through Hoop Pole Cove.

### **Knotweed Removal**

With advice and assistance from the Rockport Garden Club and DPW, RoW began the process of removing knotweed from Reed's Lane, where it had established a strong foothold. The project involved several preliminary cuttings, chemical treatment, and final clearing of treated stalks. This was the start of a multi-year project. Several other areas were identified for treatment in the coming years.

### **Graffiti Removal**

The Town's Anti-Graffiti Task Force (affiliated with RoW) engaged in removal of graffiti in several locations around town, on shore rocks, quarry walls, and boulders in the woods. The Task Force is looking to get students involved in this effort in future as a community service project.

## **OUTREACH TO OTHER TOWN BODIES AND COMMUNITY GROUPS**

### **Open Space and Recreation Plan**

In an advisory/liaison role, we contributed content and helped edit the Town's new Open Space and Recreation Plan. See the Open Space and Recreation Committee's annual report for more information.

### **Meeting of Open Space Groups**

In March RoW hosted the first-ever gathering of all the organizations and town committees that are involved in stewardship of Rockport's open spaces. The meeting served as an introduction to the work of each of the groups, and set the stage for efforts to collaborate in the future on projects of mutual interest. RoW will host the second annual meeting in March of 2020, focusing on implementation of the Town's 2019 Open Space and Recreation Plan, in which many of the groups have a designated role.

### **Support of Land Conservation**

The Rights of Way Committee wrote letters in support of several conservation endeavors, including the Conservation Commission's application for money to build up its land conservation fund, and the effort to transfer the Straitsmouth Way parcel to the Conservation Commission. RoW also opposed the sale of town land on Phillips Avenue.

### **Support of Dogtown Nomination to National Register of Historic Places**

RoW was active in support of the nomination of Dogtown to the National Register of Historic places. Although the Town of Rockport approved the nomination, the City of Gloucester did not. We were disappointed to see the effort fail. However, RoW will continue to look for ways to work with our counterparts in Gloucester on the proper management and stewardship of Dogtown.

## **POSSIBLE FUTURE PROJECTS**

### **Possible Bridge from Cape Hedge to Long Beach**

In 2020, RoW will work with DPW to secure funding for a permanent footbridge from Cape Hedge Beach to Long Beach, replacing the seasonal metal ramps and providing year-round access to Long Beach for Rockport residents.

### **Possible Bike Trail and Walking Path along Nugent Stretch**

RoW would like to improve access to and from Gloucester along Nugent Stretch for bikers and walkers, and will offer support to feasible proposals, as appropriate.

**2019 was a productive year for the Rights of Way Committee. We look forward to continuing our work and building on our success in 2020.**

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Mikus, Chair

Monica Lawton, Vice Chair

Candace Waldron, Secretary

Mary Devaney, Member and Chair of Anti-Graffiti Task Force

John Cunningham, Member

Nathan Ives, Member

Lori Morrow, Member

Mary Jane Sawyer, Member

Ann Cahill, Advisor

Tom Kerans, Advisor

Phil Morrow, Advisor



Clearing the Andrews Woods Trails in November